

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4089

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 27311

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, THA

SUBJ: BPP CLASH WITH LAHU OPIUM TRAFFICKERS

1. SUMMARY: AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI REPORTS THAT EARLY IN THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 28 A BPP NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION OPERATION ATOP DOI LARNG, MAE AI DISTRICT, CHIANG MAI PROVINCE, ENDED IN FAILURE AS FOUR BPP UNDERCOVER AGENTS WERE MURDERED. END SUMMARY.

2. AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI HAS PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING REPORT ON A NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION OPERATION THAT ENDED IN TRAGIC FAILURE: THE BPP SENT THE FOUR INTO THE SMALL LAHU VILLAGE OF RAN TAO PUN (AKA CHA DOE) AT NC 3418, ABOUT TWO KMS SOUTH OF THE BURMESE BORDER, TO NEGOTIATE THE "SALE" OF 200-300 CHOI OF OPIUM. THEY ENTERED THE VILLAGE ON THE EVENING OF SEPT 27 EQUIPPED WITH A LARGE FLASHROLL AND WERE TO BE JOINED AT 5:00 A.M. THE NEXT MORNING BY A 9 OR 10-MAN BACKUP FORCE OF BPP, WHO WOULD SEIZE THE OPIUM AND ARREST THE TRAFFICKERS. WHEN THE FOUR AGENTS FAILED TO GIVE A PREARRANGED SIGNAL BY 5:30 A.M., THE BACKUP FORCE STORMED THE VILLAGE AND FOUND IT HAD BEEN EVACUATED, LEAVING THE BODIES OF THE FOUR AGENTS IN THE HEADMAN'S HOUSE. THREE HAD DIED OF KNIFE WOUNDS; THE FOURTH, APPARENTLY STANDING GUARD OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, HAD BEEN SHOT. UNCONFIRMED PRESS REPORTS STATED THAT THE VICTIMS' FACES HAD BEEN SLASHED IN CONFORMANCE WITH LAHU BELIEFS THAT THIS WOULD PROTECT THE KILLERS FROM THE SPIRITS OF THE DECEASED, THE
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FLASHROLL, THREE M-16 RIFLES AND ONE 45-CALIBER PISTOL CARRIED

BY THE VICTIMS HAD DISAPPEARED. THE BPP ATTEMPTED TO PURSUE THE LAHU AND IN FACT ENGAGED THEM IN A BRIEF CLASH BUT FAILED TO TAKE PRISONERS AS THE LAHU EASILY COVERED THE TWO-KM DISTANCE TO CROSS THE BORDER INTO BURMA.

EMBASSY COMMENT: THIS TRAGIC INCIDENT ILLUSTRATES ONLY A FEW OF THE DANGEROUS CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH BPP ANTI-NARCOTICS TEAMS OPERATE. THE TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS ARE WELL ORGANIZED, WELL FINANCED, AND DETERMINED. IMPROVED ANTI-NARCOTICS MEASURES INVARIABLY RESULT IN CHANGES IN TRAFFICKERS' TACTICS TO COUNTER THEM. ASIDE FROM TREACHERY AND OFTEN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TERRAIN (FACTORS IN THE ABOVE INCIDENT), BPP FORCES, WHO RESPONSIBILITIES ALSO INCLUDE COPING WITH THAILAND'S GROWING INSURGENCY AND ALL FORMS OF SMUGGLING, ARE STRETCHED SO THIN EVERYWHERE THAT SMALL NARCOTICS TEAMS ARE REGULARLY OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED BY TRAFFICKING ARMIES. AT TIMES, WHEN MANPOWER IS AVAILABLE, TRANSPORTATION IS NOT, DUE TO MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS OR ROUGH TERRAIN, AND GOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERDICTION ARE PASSED UP. WE EXPECT NEW HELICOPTERS AND RTG EFFORTS TO IMPROVE BPP CAPABILITIES WILL HELP, BUT THE JOB WILL CONTINUE TO BE TOUGH AND DANGEROUS. END COMMENT.
BURKE

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